

# Profile and sexual practices of inmates in a correctional service facility in north-west Nigeria

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## Abstract

Prisoners are not exempted from sexual desire. Therefore, sexual activity is continuous in various forms behind bar, regardless of the stringent rules. However, little is known about such behaviours during incarceration in Katsina State, Nigeria. This study aimed to determine the sociodemographic and forensic characteristics as well as sexual practices among prison inmates in Katsina. A descriptive cross-sectional study was done to collect data of 216 inmates using semi-structured questionnaires from September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018 to November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018 (6 weeks) at Katsina Central Correctional Service. Data was analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS) Version 20. The mean ( $\pm$  Standard deviation, SD) ages of respondents were 31.5 $\pm$ 10.9 years. Most of the respondents (94%) were male, almost

half of them (44.4%) had secondary school education, more than half (55.1%) were into business or trading and the majority (75.9%) were awaiting trial. Nearly all inmates (98.6%) reported having sexual desire. Watching the nakedness of others (44.4%) and masturbation (38%) were the commonest means of sexual expression and satisfaction of sexual desire while in prison. The study found predominant male inmates who were within the reproductive and sexually active age group, with secondary school education and unemployed. The majority had sexual desires, with watching nakedness of others and masturbation as the commonest means of satisfying their sexual desires. Correctional facility authorities should implement sexual health programs for inmates and consider conjugal visitations/furloughs.

## Introduction

Globally, 93% of prisoners are males, while 6.5% are women.<sup>1</sup> In Nigerian prisons, less than 4% of total admissions are females, with the majority serving short-term prison terms and 50% of them between the ages of 20 and 50 years.<sup>2</sup> Many prisoners lead degrading and dehumanising sex lives when incarcerated because of sexual deprivation regardless of their sexual orientation.<sup>3</sup> Sexual desire, in prison, often accompanies an unsatisfied state. Results from Kano, Nigeria show that 82.5% of inmates have sexual desire.<sup>4</sup> The consequences of sexual deprivation results in various forms of consensual and non-consensual sex. This may be in the form of exploitive sex, homosexual satisfaction, sexual abuse or victimization.<sup>5</sup> The consequences of sexual deprivation not only affect inmates but extends to their spouses and loved ones as they await their release.<sup>5</sup> The effect of consequences of sexual deprivation is usually devastating and affect victims physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.<sup>5</sup> The predominantly Hausa-Muslim structure in the locality of the study usually puts a damper on the sexuality and sexual needs of inmates. Prior to incarceration, most prison inmates engage in risky sexual practices such as homosexuality, unprotected sex with multiple partners, transactional sex, sexual violence, commercial sex work, drug abuse, sex in exchange for drugs and impaired judgement from drug intoxication.<sup>6</sup> In gender exclusive environment, as in the case in prison, homosexuality is widespread behind the walls and the Nigerian prison is no exception.<sup>7</sup> Most inmates are circumstantial homosexuals and are lured by others due to lack of basic necessities and proper nutrition.<sup>7</sup> Homosexuality ranged from 1.4 – 82.2% in Nigerian prisons.<sup>4,7-9</sup> Overcrowding, congestion and inadequate prison staff promote these illicit sexual behaviours amongst inmates.<sup>8</sup> This is the norm in Katsina State.<sup>10</sup>

The congestion rate in prisons is high in Nigeria – 400% in Ibara prison, Abeokuta, Ogun State and 300% in Oko prison, Benin City, Edo State. The most congested prisons in Nigeria are in Anambra, Lagos, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Kaduna, Katsina, Rivers States and FCT.<sup>11</sup> The total capacity of the Katsina Correctional Service is 400 but there are currently more than 1500 inmates.<sup>12</sup> This congestion in the Nigerian prisons can be attributed to undue delay in trial.

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## Materials and Methods

### Study location

The study is conducted in Katsina Central Correction Service, one of the eleven Correctional Services in the state, because of its heterogeneity in that it contains inmates of both sexes and varied sentences as it is located in a metropolitan town. It serves both males and females with a capacity of about 400 but this has been stretched to more than 1,500 inmates in recent times.<sup>12</sup>

### Study design

The study is descriptive cross-sectional in design to collect data from respondents.

### Study population

The study population comprised of all inmates who have been in prison for at least a month in Katsina Central Correctional Service.

### Inclusion criteria

i) A prison inmate, male and female, who had been in prison for at least a month; ii) A prison inmate who provided voluntary informed consent to participate in the study.

### Exclusion criteria

i) Any mentally unstable inmate or one who was on treatment for psychiatric disorders; ii) Inmates who were very sick and/or were on admission in the prison clinic.

### Sample size determination

The sample size for quantitative study was calculated using the Fisher's formula for descriptive cross-sectional studies.<sup>13</sup>

$$n = \frac{Z^2 Pq}{d^2}$$

where:

n = Minimum sample size for the study

Z = Standard normal deviate corresponding to the probability of type I error ( $\alpha$ ) at 5% = 1.96

P = Prevalence of sexual activity among prison inmates (14.9%) obtained from a previous study<sup>4</sup> = 0.149  $\approx$  0.15

q = Complementary probability which is 1-p = 1 - 0.15 = 0.85.

d = Degree of precision of 5%

Therefore

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times (0.15 \times 0.85)}{(0.05 \times 0.05)} = 196$$

Ten percent (10%) was added to the minimum sample size to account for non-response; hence a total of 216 eligible respondents were recruited into the study.

### Study instruments

An interviewer administered, pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire adapted from a study in New South Wales<sup>14</sup> and modified to suit the objectives of this study was used for data collection.

The questionnaire had three sections and sought information on socio-demographic characteristics, forensic characteristics and sexual activity of inmates

### Data analysis

All data were entered into a Microsoft excel sheet and rechecked for entry errors and the data were cleaned prior to analysis. When necessary,

the questionnaire was traced to verify inconsistent or missing data. Data were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS) Version 20. Quantitative data were summarized using mean  $\pm$  standard deviation or the median and range depending on the distribution. Categorical data were presented as frequencies and percentages in tables and charts. At the bivariate level, Pearson's chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were used, as appropriate, to test for the significance of associations, with  $p < 0.05$  considered significant.

## Results

### Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The age of the respondents ranged from 17-85 years with a mean age ( $\pm$  Standard Deviation, SD) of 31.5  $\pm$  10.9 years. Most of the respondents (94%) are males. The majority (91.2%) of the respondents were Muslims, of the Hausa tribe (82.9%) and married (50.9%). About half of the respondents (44.4%) had secondary level of education while a quarter (25.9%) had only Qur'anic education. Less than a quarter (22.7%) of them had tertiary education. Most respondents (55.1%) were into trading or business while over a third (39.8%) were unemployed (Table 1)

**Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of inmates in Katsina Correctional Service.**

Socio-demographic Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
Mean Age $\pm$ SD	31.5 $\pm$ 10.9	
< 24	55	25.5
25-34	97	44.9
35-44	38	17.6
45-54	17	7.8
>55	9	4.2
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	203	94
Female	13	6
<b>Religion</b>		
Islam	197	91.2
Christianity	19	8.8
<b>Tribe</b>		
Hausa	179	82.9
Fulani	16	7.4
Others*	21	9.7
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	110	50.9
Single	91	42.1
Widowed/Divorced	15	7
<b>Level of education</b>		
Quranic	56	25.9
Primary	12	5.6
Secondary	96	44.4
Tertiary*	49	22.7
Adult education	3	1.4
<b>Occupation</b>		
Civil servants	11	5.1
Trading/Business*	119	55.1
Unemployed	86	39.8
Key*		

\*Others = Ibo, Yoruba, Berom, Igbira, Kanuri; \*Trading/Business = farmers, welders, carpenters, masonry, drivers, electricians, plumbers, herdsmen, labourers, petty traders; \*Tertiary education = Diploma, Undergraduate degree, Postgraduate degree.

### Forensic profile of respondents

Table 2 displays the length of sentence among inmates. The majority (75.9%) of inmates were awaiting trial while 9.3% and 5.6% of them were incarcerated for misdemeanor and felony respectively. Inmates serving life and death sentences accounted for 4.6% each of the overall prison population sampled.

Figure 1 is a bar chart showing the reasons for imprisonment of inmates in the central prison of Katsina. The most common reasons were armed robbery (22.2%), murder (19.4%), theft (18.5%) and drugs (11.6%) while the least common include harbouring theft items, hoarding culprits and pimping each accounting for 0.5% each.

Figure 2 shows the sexual orientation of inmates. The majority (82.9%) of the inmates were straight while 6.9% of them indicated that they were homosexuals, while 9.7% were undisclosed about their sexual orientation being. Only 1 (0.5%) inmate identified himself as bisexual.

### Sexual practices and choices of inmates at Katsina Correctional Service

Table 3 depicts the sexual experiences of inmates within the confines of the central prison in Katsina metropolis. Two hundred and thirteen inmates (98.6%) admitted to feeling sexual desire with 83.3% of them for women, 20% for men and 16% for both men and women. Less than half (44.4%) of the inmates confessed to feeling sexual desire by watching the nakedness of others and one-third (38%) by masturbation. About two-third of inmates admitted to satisfying their desires by watching the nakedness of others (38.7%) and masturbating (37.8%). A fraction of inmates (6.1%, 14 out of 216) admitted to multiple methods of satisfying themselves. Substantial proportions (42.1%) of inmates were aroused in prison by watching the nakedness of others. It is the most common method (25.5%) of getting aroused followed by sexual talks (13.4%). The motives for sexual relations within the confines of prison ranged from curiosity (18.1%), to loneliness (17.1%) and coercion (0.9%).

### Discussion

The socio-demographic characteristics of inmates in Katsina Correctional Service show a preponderance of males. According to the World prison population list, 93% of prison inmates are male.<sup>1</sup> Men are more likely to commit offenses that result in prison sentences. Violence is frequent and widespread in prisons that contain male inmates, and as a result, detailed hierarchical social structures

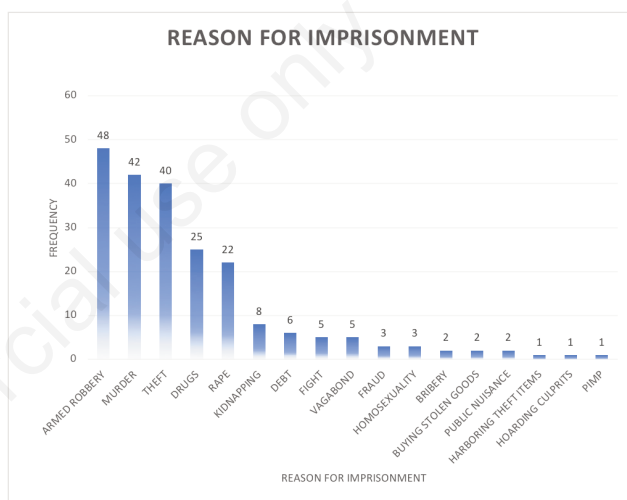
**Table 2. Length of sentence of prison inmates.**

Length of sentence	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Awaiting trial	164	75.9
Misdemeanour*	20	9.3
Felony	12	5.6
Life	10	4.6
Death sentence	10	4.6
Total	216	100

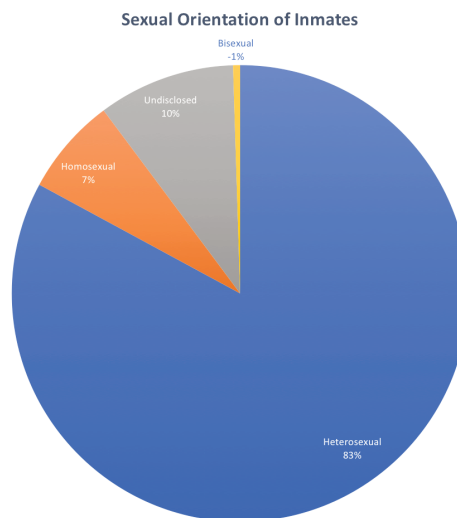
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Misdemeanour: 6 months/3 years, Felony: 37 months/21 years.

are created. Male inmates often belong to prison gangs to obtain protection and security. This is in keeping with what is obtained locally and globally.<sup>11,15,16</sup> The overall pattern is that two-thirds of inmates in the index study are below the age of 35 years which are thought to be the most sexually active as well as the ones most likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours. This portrays the characteristic age range of prisoners in Nigeria.<sup>2</sup> They are also within the productive age (work force) and is in concordance with the epidemiology of crime. This is similar to findings from studies in Nigeria and USA.<sup>7,17-19</sup> Majority of the inmates are of the Hausa-Fulani descent. This may be attributed to the locality of which the study took place. About half of the inmates in this study (50.9%) are married, while a large proportion of the remainder (42.1%) are single. Most of the inmates were Muslims (91.2%). This is a reflection of the dominant religious practice in the Correctional



**Figure 1. Bar chart showing reason of imprisonment of inmates.**



**Figure 2. Pie chart showing sexual orientation of inmates.**

facilities catchment population. More than half of inmates (44.4%) have secondary level of education before incarceration and were into trading and/or business while about a third of them are unemployed. This contrast with the findings by Audu *et al.* in Kaduna State North-western Nigeria and Fadare *et al.* in Akure, Ondo State Nigeria where about 51.4% and 51% of inmates respectively were secondary school dropouts and very high level of unemployment before incarceration.<sup>19-21</sup> A previous study by Odujinrin and Adebajo in Lagos State Nigeria in 1997 revealed a similar finding to the index study where 52% of inmates had secondary school education.<sup>22</sup> It is saddening on the length of stay of inmates in Nigerian Correctional services. The index study revealed that 75.9% of inmates are awaiting trial. This is similar to what was found in other parts of Nigeria.<sup>23-24</sup> This is probably due to delay

and complexity of the judiciary system in the country. Available data on the rate of awaiting trial persons for different countries show that the Nigerian figure is high – Japan (11.3%), Malawi (12.3%), United Kingdom (12.9%), South Africa (20.2%), USA (21.5%), Malaysia (21.6%), Ghana (22.6%), Egypt (41.4%) and Cameroon (60.7%).<sup>25</sup> Five out of the ten countries in the world with most pre-trial detainees are African countries.<sup>26</sup>

The three highest occurring offences were armed robbery, murder and theft in index study. This is similar to a study by Armiya'u *et al.* in Jos, Nigeria that revealed identical findings.<sup>26</sup> The high proportion of violent crimes may be explained by the fact that the study was conducted in a medium security Correctional service facility. A similar finding was found in a hospital-based study where murder was the commonest offence.<sup>27,28</sup> In contrast, find-

**Table 3. Summary of sexual experiences of inmates in Katsina Correctional service.**

Sexual variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Feeling sexual desire		
Yes	213	98.6
Sexual desire with whom		
Both men and women	16	7.4
Men	20	9.3
Women	180	83.3
Mode of sexual desire		
Celibacy	26	12
Consensual sex	1	0.5
Exposing nakedness to others	10	4.6
Masturbation	82	38
Touching of genitals	1	0.5
Watching nakedness of others	96	44.4
Mode of satisfaction		
Anal sex	5	2.2
Celibacy	26	11.3
Mutual anal insertion	1	0.4
Masturbation	87	37.8
Putting fingers in anus	3	1.3
Masturbation, anal sex	2	1.0
Masturbation, anal sex, oral sex, putting fingers in anus	1	0.4
Masturbation, oral sex	2	1.0
Masturbation, putting fingers in anus	1	0.4
Touching of genitals	10	4.3
Watching nakedness of others	89	38.7
Watching nakedness of others, anal sex	1	0.4
Watching nakedness of others, fingers in anus	1	0.4
Watching nakedness of others, masturbation	1	0.4
Arousal		
Yes	125	42.1
No	91	57.9
How they got aroused?		
Sexual talks	29	13.4
Watching others naked	55	25.5
Sexual thoughts	27	12.5
Looking at others	2	0.9
Seeing women in clinic	1	0.5
Wet dreams	1	0.5
Nil	100	46.3
Touching each other	1	0.5
Motive for sexual relations within the prison		
Celibacy	1	0.5
Coercion	2	0.9
Curiosity	39	18.1
Economic manipulation	6	2.8
Loneliness	37	17.1
Nil	127	58.8
Peer pressure	4	1.9

ings from other studies in Nigeria differed from index study.<sup>17,29-30</sup>

Sexual desire is, at its most literal, the feeling that accompanies an unsatisfied state. According to clinical psychologist, sexual desire is a bodily urge more analogous to hunger or the blood's need for oxygen.<sup>31</sup> It is thus one of the – if not *the* strongest of human needs.<sup>31</sup> In a book review, a researcher described sexual desire as an existential need that is universal for all types of gender and leaves a person with an emptiness that is usually fulfilled through a desired gender.<sup>32</sup> This study revealed that almost all the respondents (98.6%) reported having sexual desire with about three-quarters of them having it for women. This is similar to what was found in a study conducted in Kano central Correctional service, North-western Nigeria where 82.5% of inmates reported having frequent sexual desire.<sup>4</sup>

Sexual practices inside prison occurs with utmost secrecy and low levels of disclosure and openness on the subject amongst inmates, more especially to outsiders.<sup>33</sup> The four most common means by which inmates in the index study expressed their sexual desire were touching of genitals (self or others), masturbation, celibacy and exposing their nakedness to others. This is similar to what was found in other studies across Nigeria.<sup>4,7,15</sup> The options for satisfying this desire was majorly by watching the nakedness of others followed by masturbation, celibacy and touching of others. This is in keeping with what was found in the Kano study.<sup>4</sup> Homosexuality was rare in this study. This may be attributable to the fact that many inmates were unwilling to admit to such behaviour for fear of further disciplinary action as homosexuality is a criminal offence in Nigeria and carries an additional 14 years jail term unlike in many Western countries where it is legal. Various studies, some of which are from Scottish prisons and Arthur Road Jail in India, also reported a low rate of reported homosexuality which they attributed to non-acceptance of homosexuality in prison population and limited opportunity for sexual activity in prison.<sup>34-35,19</sup> However, some studies in Nigerian prisons revealed homosexuality as the commonest sexual practice.<sup>15</sup> This could be facilitated in prison due to overcrowding. In many prisons, men are crowded into cells with one another, often resulting in a lack of privacy. Inmates can watch other inmates change clothes, use the bathroom, and take showers. Situations like this create an impossible environment for officials to control. Older, more experienced inmates use the overcrowded situation to their advantage by exploiting the younger, more naive inmates.

This study had limitation. First, this study was conducted in only one of the eleven correctional facilities in the State, there could be variations from other facilities within the state. Second, cultural inhibitions or fear of reprimand could result in socially acceptable responses introducing social desirability bias. Nonetheless the study provides insight into the sexual lives of the mostly ignored population behind bars.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, even though sex in correctional facilities is an under-researched subject, this study showed that it does occur within the confines of correctional facilities. This study has found that nearly all inmates (98.6%) reported having sexual desire with watching the nakedness of others (44.4%) and masturbation (38%) as the commonest means of sexual expression and satisfaction of sexual desire within prison. Correctional facility authorities should develop programs aimed at improving the sexual health of inmates and consider the possibility of conjugal visitations/furloughs to prevent sexually deviant and improper ways of relieving sexual

desire. Further, mixed methods studies could provide more nuanced insight.

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